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TAGS: [WFP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: WORLD FOOD PROGRAM DEALS WITH MAOISTS AND GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION

REF: KATHMANDU 1221

Classified By: DCM Robert Boggs for Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary. The World Food Program (WFP) in Nepal has been operating in the most heavily Maoist-affected areas in Nepal since the last quarter of 2002. WFP Director Joergensen reports that through April 2003, the cease-fire had enabled villagers and traders to travel freely, increasing access to food in Maoist-controlled areas. WFP field officers do, however, encounter frequent difficulties with Maoist cadres. Since May 2003, Director Joergensen began receiving reports from the field of heightened security and increased travel restrictions by the Maoists. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Maoist organization is well-coordinated, with a sophisticated intelligence gathering network. WFP Nepal has also encountered trouble with central and district level government corruption, which has resulted in their filing of four legal cases with the Commission to Investigate Abuses of Authority (CIAA). End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The World Food Program (WFP) in Nepal is one of two UN-based agencies (the other is UNICEF) working daily in the most heavily Maoist-affected areas in the country. Because government corruption had been preventing the efficient delivery of food to high-risk areas, shortly after her arrival in August 2002 WFP Director Erika Joergensen decentralized WFP's Nepal program to the district level. Today WFP employs 24 Nepali field officers in 30 of Nepal's 75 districts and staffs four regional offices, including one in Kathmandu. WFP programs focus on rural community infrastructure building, such as road construction and irrigation projects, mother and child health and nutrition, and food for education initiatives. WFP also provides the food for 100,000 Bhutanese refugees in seven camps in Eastern Nepal. Most recently, WFP received permission from the Government of Nepal to implement a Quick Impact Program. The program will mobilize 1,500 tons of food for ten districts with heightened levels of food insecurity, often caused by Maoist insurgents restricting villagers' access to markets. These districts are Humla, Mugu, Dolpa, Rukum, Rolpa, Jajarkot, Kalikot, Jumla, Bajura, and Bajhang.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In its January through March quarterly report, WFP Nepal reported that the cease-fire has largely been holding without major incident. A modicum of peace and stability has returned to districts that had been highly influenced by insurgent activities. There has been increased freedom of movement for both people and commodities. As a result, many people who had left villages because of security concerns reportedly have been returning and, in some cases, police and Royal Nepal Army soldiers have been able to visit their families at the village level after long absences. However, significant apprehension remains in the western districts of Nepal that peace talks will not produce results. In May, WFP field officers began reporting stepped-up security and increased travel restrictions by the Maoists.

Dealing with the Maoists

[1](#)4. (S) Working primarily in heavily Maoist-affected areas, the field officers encounter frequent difficulties in implementing WFP programs. From the beginning, Joergensen required her field officers to spend the first month introducing themselves to district-level government officials, NGOs and the Maoists so that all parties would be aware of WFP's programs and objectives. This approach has enabled her field officers to move freely in areas that are otherwise heavily restricted by the Maoists. The only district that remains largely inaccessible is Kalikot, where the Maoist district commander reportedly is uncooperative and violent.

[1](#)5. (S) However, according to Director Joergensen, the Maoists have attempted to intimidate WFP field officers and to steal food and equipment from WFP. In Western Nepal's Bajura District, Maoists seized the local WFP officer and detained

him for ten days, she said. During his detention, he was taken to the Maoist district commander's tent in the jungle. Although they had never met, the commander pondered for a few minutes, wondering where he had seen the WFP officer before. Asking his subordinate for a file, the commander pulled out a paper with the field officer's photograph and biographic information, including his year of birth and previous employment.

16. (S) More frequently, Maoist cadres steal WFP food supplies either to eat or sell for cash, Joergensen reported. When this has happened, WFP has shut down its program in the area and explained to the residents that until the goods are returned, the program could not continue. Surprisingly, the Maoists typically have returned what they did not eat or sell and, in some cases, worked off the rest. Clearly, WFP is providing necessary goods for the very poor and underprivileged people that the Maoist organization claims to be supporting.

Government Corruption

17. (S) Prior to decentralizing its operations, WFP experienced significant setbacks with Government of Nepal (GON) cooperation. WFP provides 100 percent funding for all food distributed in Nepal and 50 percent of the transportation cost, with the GON contributing the other 50 percent. Joergensen learned soon after her arrival that much of WFP's transportation fund was not being drawn upon by the GON for the transportation and delivery of food. She later discovered that government officials at both the central and district levels had been stealing food and selling it for their own personal profit. On the basis of these complaints, Joergensen has filed four cases, which are now pending, with the Commission to Investigate Abuses of Authority (CIAA). (Note: The CIAA is a GON agency mandated with investigating allegations of government corruption (reftel). End Note.)

18. (C) WFP Nepal has also encountered less serious, but still troublesome, cases of government corruption. For example, district-level officials were directing WFP to contract the transportation and food distribution to businesses owned by family and friends. Within the central government, officials in the Ministries of Finance, Agriculture and Local Development would request training abroad ostensibly to learn how the French, for example, run school lunch programs. After WFP denied their requests, Director Joergensen explained, Ministry officials would "stop working on WFP programs."

Comment

19. (S) Through the WFP field officers' encounters with Maoists in western Nepal, it appears that the insurgents are well-coordinated and very well-informed. Most district commanders appear to be staying 'on message' by allowing WFP to operate relatively unhindered, distributing food to the most needy, even in predominantly Maoist-controlled areas. The WFP's experience of increasing Maoist restrictions on travel are consistent with reports from other aid agencies of rising levels of Maoist extortion and threats against local development workers. End Comment.

MALINOWSKI